

## Free My Husband, My People

By AVITAL SHCHARANSKY

As the world wonders what the new faces and changed style of the Soviet leadership will mean at the summit meeting in Geneva, we should recall the one occasion on which Mikhail Gorbachev lost his temper during his recent state visit to France. Responding to a news conference question about the treatment of Jews and dissidents in the Soviet Union, the usually unflappable Mr. Gorbachev suddenly lost his composure and, pounding the table, shouted that no one had the right to interfere in the Soviet Union's internal affairs.

Unfortunately, none of the journalists followed up by asking how Mr. Gorbachev could reconcile his position with the fact that in 1975 his government signed the Helsinki accords, whose human-rights provisions stipulate that "everyone has a right to leave any country, including his own" and that "participating states will deal in a positive and humanitarian spirit with the applications of persons who wish to be reunited with their family."

Like millions of freedom-loving people, my husband Anatoly saw in these accords a ray of hope. If indeed the Soviet Union, in exchange for the West's recognition of its hegemony in Eastern Europe, would allow the liberalization of contact and movement, perhaps "detente" would become not just another diplomatic cliché but truly a new era of hope and promise.

So Anatoly joined a Helsinki watch committee, one of the many that sprung up throughout the world to monitor compliance with the accords. Within months he was arrested, charged with espionage for the Central Intelligence Agency, and sentenced to three years in prison and 10 years of hard labor. After transfer to a work camp, he was placed in solitary confinement for 90 days as punishment for lighting Hanukkah candles and reciting the Hebrew Psalms. While there, he was kept alive on a diet of bread and water, the

bread only every other day. A year ago, he was again put in isolation.

My husband's health has deteriorated dangerously. He suffers from severe pains in his chest and eyes. Months pass when he is not heard from, when no one is allowed to visit him. In his last letter he says, "I would like to dream of our reuniting in Jerusalem but I need all my energies just to survive as a human being."

Since the signing of the accords, Soviet policy on Jewish emigration has been a roller coaster: from a peak of 50,000 visas in 1979, the year before the Moscow Olympics, to a trickle of a few hundred a year now. But there has been no inconsistency about suppressing any activity on behalf of the Helsinki accords. It is as if the Soviet Union recognizes what we too must understand—that there is more here than just a question of human rights. The Helsinki accords are an international contract that the Soviet government solemnly signed and that it has never shown the slightest intention of honoring. Living up to the Helsinki obligations, it should be noted, would entail no political or strategic risk for the U.S.S.R. One wonders how it would honor a treaty in which military and political compromises are involved.

Many hoped that the new leadership would bring change. If anything, the change has been for the worse. The treatment of dissidents is more brutal—beatings and solitary confinement are commonplace—and the charges ever more spurious and outlandish. Within the past weeks Roald Zelichonok of Leningrad, after corresponding with public officials in the West, was convicted of "defaming the Soviet state" and sentenced to three years in labor camp. After applying for permission to emigrate, cardiologist Vladimir Brodsky of Moscow was convicted of "hooliganism" and sentenced to three years in prison.

For appealing her husband's conviction on trumped up drug and weapon charges, Lydia Koifman was ordered confined to a mental hospital. For distributing Leon Uris's "Exodus," Leonid Volvovsky was convicted for slander and sentenced to three years in prison.

Shirley Williams, a leader in Britain's Social Democratic Party, recently asserted that, like most reasonable people, she was fully aware of the public-relations aspects of the Soviets' summit proposals, but that it was imperative they be given a chance to prove their sincerity. I can see no better way for them to do so than to live up to an accord they signed 10 years ago, and to let my husband and 400,000 other Jews who have expressed their desire to leave the U.S.S.R. join their families abroad.

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*Ms. Shcharansky, who left the Soviet Union in 1974, now lives in Israel. This week she took up a vigil in front of the Soviet Embassy in Washington.*